

## THE FACTORS OF REVOLT

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### ABSTRACT

This research essay introduces a frame of reference for the analysis of the Theory and Practice of Communist revolution.

KEYWORDS: Revolution, Communist, Malaya, Theory, Ideology, Leadership, Communist Party of Malaya, Lenin, Factors of Revolt, Causative, Effective.

### INTRODUCTION

*"Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."*

What is to be Done  
(Lenin 1988:91)

Politics, when stripped of its abstractions, might be ungraciously described as the competition for and justification of, the exercise of power.

However, in an attempt to apply a degree of order (and presumably dignity) to the world, social theorists have established a veritable bibliotheca of abstractions, theories, typologies and models explaining what politics "really" is.

These divergent theories of society and politics sometimes cloud the issues under examination. The resultant confusion is compounded by interminable disagreements among social theorists about their terms of reference. As John Plamenatz succinctly observed:

There are sociologists and political scientists who put themselves to great trouble to define the terms they use and to state their assumptions. They do not always do it well. (Plamenatz 1969:XI).

A case in point is the question of revolution.

Theorists of revolution are legion - the 'Great Revolution' school, functionalists, Marxists, Communists, anarchists and nationalists to suggest a few. The volume of their theoretical endeavour is confounded by the confusing litter of revolutions throughout history - the Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions, the Technological and Computer Revo-

lutions, the Green Revolution, the Glorious Revolution, the October and Cultural Revolutions and, in recent vogue, a variety of 'People's Revolutions' - to list a cross section.

Given that revolutions, in all their various guises, have come to dominate twentieth century political history, it is not surprising that the notion of 'revolution' has spawned a formidable body of revolutionary theorists - many of whom would agree with the premise that revolution has become the 'central concept in the vocabulary of modern political thought.' (O'Sullivan 1983:4).

Needless to say, there is no accepted frame of reference about the nature of revolution. Indeed, ethical and social scientific distinctions between revolution, rebellion, insurrection, insurgency, guerrilla war, terrorism, civil war and other manifestations of internal belligerency, abound.

It is not the object of this paper to present yet another general theory of revolution. It is rather, the very limited object of this paper to introduce a frame of reference to analyse a particular aspect of a particular type of revolution.

In so doing, the paper will be predicated upon two premises, namely:

a. in the general historical sense, revolution can be understood as an abrupt, distinctive and determinative process of change distinguishing a given period of history from its predecessor

and

b. in the political sense, revolution can be understood as an extra-legal challenge to power through the application of political violence.

In the case of Malaya, the Communists sought recourse to political violence in their challenge to power. This political violence was subsequently described by the Communists as the 'Malayan Revolutionary War'. (CPM:1948). This essay is a component part of a major study of the Communist movement in both Singapore and Malaysia.

The Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) has consistently claimed its theoretical legitimacy through its adherence to both the Theory and Practice of Marxism-Leninism. *Ergo* it has always seen itself as a revolutionary party and proclaimed its doctrinal purity accordingly. Recurring themes within this doctrine suggested the frame of reference hereafter described.

Significantly, the history of the CPM mirrors one of the fundamental elements of revolution, namely, the process whereby the potential for revolution is translated into the ordered application of arms. This process will be described in this paper as *The Factors of Revolt*. (See Fig. 1).

Accepting the CPM's theoretical kinship with a select few from the pantheon of Communist revolutionary theorists, it is appropriate that its revolutionary Theory and Practice should be analysed against their prescriptions.

It follows therefore that the frame of reference for this analysis, *The Factors of Revolt*, owes much in its creation to the Marxist-Leninist, Stalinist and Maoist theories of revolution. It needs also to be said that this frame of reference was developed to accommodate the considerable variation in the Theory and Practice of the aforementioned.

The question of language and terminology that has changed its meaning and, significantly, its interpretation, has presented the international Communist movement with a legacy of theoretical confusion. The ongoing doctrinal debate amongst Marxists of all persuasions is notable for both its complexity and disputatious nature. These complexities have served to confuse and frustrate a generation of scholars of Communist theory. One such scholar was moved to proclaim:

Their doctrine combines a religion and eschatology of salvation; a vast accumulation (from pre-1848 to the present) of political commentary and judgements, most of them out of date if they were ever valid; an economics now

irrelevant; a historical sociology and critique of economic and social institutions, much of which is still suggestive; a philosophy which is little more than verbal casuistry. To make matters worse, every assertion in the voluminous, contradictory writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin is held up to be part of a single science, a canon of which any sentence may be treated as having probative value. (Wolfe 1962-3:158)

Quite obviously it is beyond the scope of this essay to present a detailed analysis of the semantics, theses and interpretations that constitute the conformable basis of Communist revolutionary theory. Such an analysis will be included in the writer's completed research. *The Factors of Revolt* herein presented is a synthesis of the salient features of these diverse theories thereby providing a basis for detailed analysis of individual Communist revolutions.

In deference to both Wolfe and Plamenatz, it is hoped that the limited frame of reference defined by this paper will not add too much to the general confusion of the genre.

## DISCUSSION

### Assumptions

In discussing the pursuit of power, Hans Morgenthau argued that it is a characteristic of all politics that participants usually seek recourse to a set of moral arguments which serve to justify and legitimise the course of action being undertaken:

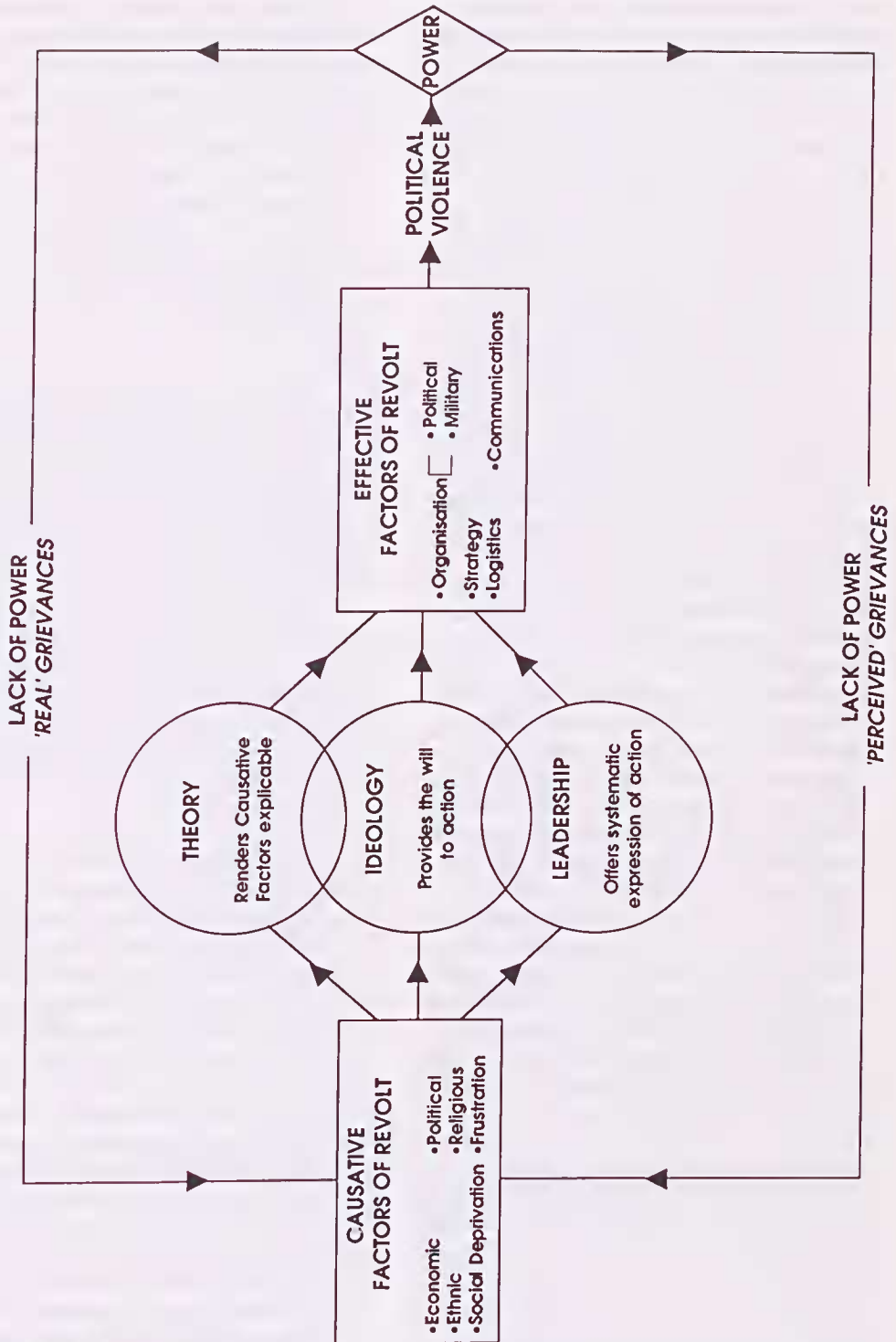
'... the element of power as the immediate goal of the policy pursued is explained and justified in ethical, legal or biological terms. That is to say: the true nature of the policy is concealed by ideological justifications and rationalisations.' (Morgenthau 1973:89)

If these justificatory arguments are integral to the pursuit of power, it follows that they must also be integral to the understanding of the nature of revolution.

Revolutions do not simply occur.

A revolution represents an extreme form of political disagreement. It signifies the withdrawal of one of the parties from the constitutional forum with the object of achieving a radical *transformation* of the political system far beyond the limited goals available through the constitutional process.

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This objective is pursued through the ordered application of political violence.

Such violence can only be fomented through the manipulation of the raw potential for revolt - those diverse and often diffuse

elements that comprise the base for dissatisfaction, such as grievances based on psychological, economic, social, political, ethnic and religious grounds. Clearly distinguished from incidents of particularised violence,



such as communal, industrial, religious and so forth, revolutionary activity is the successful translation of all the potentially destabilising forces within society into a *total*, extra-legal challenge to power. This challenge has, as its basis, clearly defined objectives regarding the pursuit and exercise of power and the nature and form of the new society.

The nature of revolution in general and the essence of Communist revolutions in particular, is given eloquent expression in Mao Tse tung's aphorism on the subject:

'A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.' (Mao Tse tung 1966:11)

Within the Marxist view of history, revolution represents a legitimate process of accelerated change and is, therefore, to be actively encouraged:

'Both for the production on a mass scale of this Communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a **revolution**; (sic) this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew. (Marx-Engels Vol. 1. 1977:41)

Thereby revolutions become "... the locomotives of history." (Marx-Engels Vol. 1. 1977:277)

The question facing all potential revolutionaries, Communist or otherwise, is how to make a revolution occur, and, significantly, how to control and direct it once it has occurred.

Twentieth century revolutionary practice has as its inspiration the rich gallery of nineteenth century Russian anarchism. Robert Payne, in his *Life and Death of Lenin*, suggested that Lenin was quick to acknowledge his debt to one of the more sinister figures of the Russian revolutionary hagiography, Sergei Nechayev. (Payne 1964:34)

Anarchist, revolutionary and author of the *Revolutionary Catechism*, Nechayev advocated the application of ordered violence aimed at the total negation of the state through the activities of a conspiratorial elite of professional and committed revolutionaries:

1. The revolutionary is a doomed man. He has no personal interests, no attachments, no property and no name. Everything in him is wholly absorbed in the single thought and the single passion for revolution.

and

22. By a revolution the Society does not mean an orderly revolt according to the classic western model - a revolt which always stops short of attacking the rights of property and the traditional social systems of so called civilisation and morality. Until now such a revolution has always limited itself to the overthrow of one political form in order to replace it with another, thereby attempting to bring about a so-called revolutionary state. The only form of revolution beneficial to the people is one which destroys the entire state to the roots and exterminates all the state traditions, institutions and classes in Russia. (Payne 1964:24-28).

*The Revolutionary Catechism* represented a break with the anarchist tradition that linked revolution with individual acts of terrorism. It provided both a *modus operandi* for conspiratorial action and a code of ethics which effectively elevated the notion of revolution as an end in itself. To these ethics Lenin was to introduce the idea of political organisation. Given his single mindedness on the matter and the indisputable success of his stratagem, it is hardly surprising that Lenin found himself subject to accusations and abuse from his political opponents for employing "Nechayevist" methods. (Trotsky 1972:27).

Lenin also claimed to be a faithful exponent of Marx's revolutionary theory:

'The necessity of systematically imbuing the masses with **this** (sic) and precisely this view of violent revolution lies at the root of the **entire** (sic) theory of Marx and Engels.' (Lenin 1969:22)

Discussing the historical context of revolutionary development, Lenin defines his understanding of the basis of Marxist theory:

'True to his philosophy of dialectical materialism, Marx takes as his basis the historical experience of the great years of revolution, 1848 to 1851. Here, as everywhere else, his theory is **summing up of experience**, (sic) illuminated by a profound philosophical conception of the world and a rich knowledge of history.' (Lenin 1969:28)

Part of this 'conception of the world' was the Marxian unity of Theory and Practice. Transposed into Lenin's terms, theory, in 'summing up experience', was of no value unless it offered a programme of action. Theory had to be dynamic as form (*i.e.* reality,) was ever changing.

In *What is to Be Done?*, sub-titled 'Painful Questions of Our Movement,' Lenin critically examined the political opposition in Russia, the potential revolutionary forces in Russia and the actual revolutionary activity in the country. He found all three areas wanting.

Suggesting that there was little to support the theory that the proletariat had any potential for being a *spontaneous* revolutionary force, and caustic in his criticism of the apparent inertia of the 'economists' and the naivette of the 'primitivists', Lenin posed the following:

'Why do the Russian workers still manifest little revolutionary activity in response to the brutal treatment of the people by the police ... We must blame ourselves and our lagging behind the mass movement for our still being unable to organise sufficiently wide, impressive and rapid exposures of all the shameful outrages.' (Lenin 1988:135-136)

He concluded that effective organisation was the key to leading the proletariat along the path towards revolution.

In *What is to Be Done* and subsequent works, including his *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (1905) and his *April Thesis* (1917), Lenin extended his analyses into a prescription for revolutionary organisation centred around the transformation of the inertia of the masses into revolutionary activity. Abandoning the ideal of spontaneous mass uprising, he, like Nechayev, argued in favour of a highly centralised underground political movement comprised of dedicated (and professional)

activists and revolutionaries that would engineer revolution and seize power in the name of the workers. This was to be achieved through centralised political organisation; resolute and unquestioned leadership; thorough political training and, of course, total commitment and unity of purpose:

'I assert: (1) that no revolutionary movement can endure without a stable organisation of leaders maintaining continuity; (2) that the broader the popular mass drawn spontaneously into the struggle, which forms the basis of the movement and participates in it, the more urgent the need for such an organisation, and more solid this organisation must be (for it is much easier for all sorts of demagogues to side-track the more backward section of the masses); (3) that such an organisation must consist chiefly of people professionally engaged in revolutionary activity; (4) that in an autocratic state, the more we **confine** (sic.) the membership of such an organisation to people who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activity and who have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police, the more difficult will it be to unearth the organisation; and (5) the **greater** (sic.) will be the number of people from the working class and from the other social classes who will be able to join the movement and perform active work in it.' (Lenin 1988:185)

Lenin was scathingly critical of any method other than that which he prescribed:

'A person who is flabby and shaky on questions of theory, who has a narrow outlook, who pleads the spontaneity of the masses as an excuse for his own sluggishness, who resembles a trade-union secretary more than a tribune of the people, who is unable to conceive of a broad and bold plan that would command the respect even of opponents, and who is inexperienced and clumsy in his own professional art - the art of combating the political police - such a man is not a revolutionary, but a wretched amateur!' (Lenin 1988:188)

It needs be said that not all Russian Marxists were enamoured with either Lenin or the Bolsheviks. Many remained chary, recognising that Bolshevism held within itself the



seeds of dictatorship. On November 7 1917, writing in *Novaya Zhizn*, Maxim Gorky gave expression to this fear:

'... but I believe that the good sense of the working class and its awareness of its historical tasks will soon open the eyes of the Proletariat to the utter impossibility of realising Lenin's promises, to all the depth of his madness, and to his Nechaev and Bakunin brand of anarchism... Does the Russian democracy remember the ideas for the triumph of which it struggled against the despotism of the monarchy? Does it consider itself capable of continuing this struggle now? Does it remember that when the Romanov gendarmes threw its ideological leaders into prisons and hard-labour camps, it called this method of struggle base? In what way does Lenin's attitude towards freedom of speech differ from the same attitude of a Stolypin, a Pleve, and other half-humans? Does not Lenin's government, as the Romanov government did, seize and drag off to prison all those who think differently?' (Gorky 1968: 85-86)

Nonetheless, Bolshevism was to beget a new canon in the eschatology of revolution - the notion of scientific revolution which had, at its core, a vanguard party '... guided by the most advanced theory.' (Lenin, 1988:92) And, although subsequent Communist theoreticians modified Lenin's theories to suit their particular 'objective' conditions, his prescriptions on transforming the inertia of the masses through theory (organisation), ideology and leadership became the hallmark of international Communist revolutionary theory after the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917.

The interplay between the theory and practice of revolution was given further expression by Stalin, who, elaborating upon Lenin, stated that: 'Theory is the experience of the working-class movement in all countries taken in its general aspect. Of course, theory becomes purposeless if it is not connected with revolutionary practice, just as practice gropes in the dark if its path is not illuminated by revolutionary theory.' (Stalin 1970:22)

In his famous refutation of Kautsky's critique of Bolshevism, Trotsky answered his own rhetorical question about the importance of theory and ideology:

'Is there still theoretical necessity to justify revolutionary terrorism? Unfortunately, yes. Ideology, by its very essence, plays in the Socialist movement an enormous part. Even for practical England the period has arrived when the working class must exhibit an ever-increasing demand for a theoretical statement of its experiences and its problems.' (Trotsky 1969:9)

And, underscoring the role and significance of ideology in maintaining requisite revolutionary fervour and commitment, Kim Il Sung urged that:

'We should educate and reform all Party members and working people in Marxist-Leninist ideology so that all the labouring masses in the northern half fight on with a firm faith in Communism.' (Kim Il Sung 1971:91)

Finally, for Mao Tse-tung, authority and leadership, the keystone of Communist revolutionary theory and practice, remained with the Party:

'If there is to be a revolution, there must be a revolutionary Party. Without a revolutionary Party, without a Party built on the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory and in the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary style, it is impossible to lead the working class and the broad masses of the people in defeating imperialism and its running dogs. (Mao Tse-tung 1966:1)

It may be accepted therefore that theory, ideology and leadership are intrinsic to the practice of Communist revolution. Theory is the "expression" of experience; ideology provides the sustaining myth to follow and without theoretically and ideologically sound leadership "it is impossible to lead the working class and the broad masses of the people."

### Factors of Revolt

The symbiotic relationship between theory, ideology and leadership adds credence to Morgenthau's "ideological justifications and rationalisations." For Communist revolutionaries, theory becomes an important justificatory measure, laying the foundations for revolt and a method for achieving it in the name of a higher social order. Ideology provides the world view and legitimacy for revolt and the unimpeachable vanguard party,

built upon and guided by that theory, provides the focus for revolution.

Developing this concept, the Communist perspective of revolution can be understood through an analysis of what this paper will describe as the relationship between the **Causative Factors** and **Effective Factors** of Revolt.

The Causative Factors are those complex elements that comprise the basis of dissatisfaction, namely grievances based on psychological, economic, social, political, ethnic, religious factors and so on. These are usually associated with a real or perceived alienation from, and oppression by, the power *i.e.* the State. Brought together, these elements have the potential to inspire revolt.

Should these elements be harnessed through the intermedia of **Theory, Ideology** and **Leadership**, they are translated into the Effective Factors of Revolt that comprise the practical manifestations of political violence, namely military and political organisation, strategy, logistics, communications, propaganda and so forth. These factors serve to implement the ordered application of such violence.

The theoretical foundations of political violence provide the medium through which the Causative Factors may be legitimised, serving as a course of action for revolutionary activity. In turn, these foundations are moulded into Effective Factors through the development of cogent ideologically based arguments and policies and sound leadership.

A revolutionary group needs to articulate, mobilise and sustain support for its cause. This can only be achieved by transforming the Causative Factors of Revolt into Effective Factors through the aforementioned symbiosis of theory, ideology and leadership.

Theory renders the Causative Factors explicable, ideology provides the will and impetus to action and leadership provides the systematic expression of action.

It is, therefore, incumbent upon the revolutionary group to provide appropriate expression to the "experience" of those it purportedly leads. This expression, in turn, should be articulated through cogent ideological argument to mobilise committed and organised support for revolution.

Finally, the transformation of this revolutionary support into revolutionary action

(Effective Factors) is achieved through both the theoretical (vanguard) and personal (charismatic) components of leadership. (Coe 1986:67).

Should these components be synchronous, the Effective Factors are likely to coalesce as a co-ordinated challenge to power, reflecting the diffuse grievances from which it developed.

In analysing Communist revolutions, the Factors of Revolt provide a general frame of reference for testing the applicability of the revolutionary party's theory, ideology and leadership against both the foundations and practice of its revolt.

### Proposition

During its challenge to power in Malaya, the Malayan Communist Party set great store in applied theory:

'There is no substitute for diligent and constructive study of Marxist-Leninist theory. Without a sound and daily reinforced ideological foundation, the ability to perceive, discern and act cannot but be unequal to the task at hand. Two trends - both equally harmful - in the field of theoretical studies should be combated. One is the trend of intellectual abstractionism - so common and baneful among those with a bourgeois academic background. This trend manifests itself in a kind of arrogant detachment from persons and events that are integral parts of the Revolutionary movement. A look around the Marxist-Leninist Parties that have failed, in contrast to those that have succeeded, will readily show how futile a Party led by intellectual abstractionists can become in relatively short time. The other trend is that of 'intellectual slumming'; that is, a brand of petty-bourgeois sentimentality which says, in effect, that the working class can do no wrong and, therefore, needs no theories. People who talk and work like that should not complain when they find themselves at the head of a neo-Fascist movement comprised of a horde of the dirtiest lot of *lumpen* degenerates from the working class and the peasantry who ever scorned theory.' (CPM 1965:11)

The Party also claimed to be at the vanguard of the revolution:

'On the one hand, the Liberation Army is being led by the Communist Party, true to the doctrines and spirit of Marxism-Leninism, and is thus able to learn during the course of the struggle, to take advantage of the lessons of the revolutionary wars in other lands throughout the world -...' (CPM 1948)

The Malayan Communist Party failed in its revolt. Its failure can be attributed to several factors, not least being the intractability of the government in the face of challenge - an intractability evidenced by political will; sound political, civil and military intelligence supported by superior military strength and, ultimately, the ability to carry popular support.

But also and by its own definition, the Party's failure might be adduced to either a lack of diligent study, too many futile abstractions, too much 'intellectual slumming' or its failure to take advantage of lessons of other revolutionary wars. These issues beg the question as to whether the revolutionary practice of the Party was an accurate reflection of its theory.

These abstractions will be tested against the Factors of Revolt.

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Accepted 19 July 1989